

2 May 1961

ATTN: HQ USA: Excerpts from estimates concerning Chinese Communist Reactions to the Introduction of Limited Numbers of US Combat Forces into Laos.

1. 21 February 1961: CNE 58-61: "Probable Communist Reactions to Certain US Courses of Action with Respect to Laos" (TOP SECRET)

Paragraph 20: "We believe that Bloc reactions would be essentially determined by the USSR, except in those instances, as discussed below, where specific military measures engaged special Chinese Communist or DRV sensitivities."

"a. The commitment of a volunteer, composite-nationality ground force in Laos. If the security of the PL forces were threatened, additional number of (DRV) "Lao" or "border" forces would probably be committed to stabilize the situation. We believe it unlikely that Chinese Communist "volunteers" would be committed, although we cannot rule out this possibility."

"b. The overt commitment of US and allied nation combat aircraft in Laos. . . ."

"c. The commitment of overt US and allied ground forces to garrison or combat duty in Laos. Bloc reactions would probably be similar to, but more intense than, those described for air action (b) above. In particular, the chances are about even that the USSR would at the same time sponsor DRV intervention in Laos, and it might even acquiesce in Chinese Communist intervention."

2. 20 March 1961: AD/NM Memorandum to the DCI, "Probable Communist Reactions to Certain Actions in Laos" (SECRET)

Paragraph 3: "Since the present situation developed in December there has been no evidence of differences between Soviet and Chinese views on the handling of the situation in Laos. We believe that such differences would not appear in any significant way unless there was a danger of serious setback for the Pathet Lao. In this case, an issue over the degree of risk the Bloc should assume in intervening to protect the Pathet Lao could present a severe test to the presently strained relationship between the Sino-Soviet partners."

Paragraph 6: "If the Bloc leaders were either indeterminate regarding the mission of the joint force (US and Allied) or convinced that its intentions were approximately as declared, they would have at their disposal a wider range of choices. Chief among the courses they could choose are: (a) accept the invitation to negotiate on condition that the joint military force be withdrawn before negotiations began; (b) leave the invitation hanging while they sought by a combination of guerrilla harassment and international political pressure to force withdrawal of the joint force; and (c) reject the invitation while simultaneously increasing assistance to the Pathet Lao."

Paragraph 7: "So much depends upon the actual situation prevailing at the time of decision that we are unable to exclude any of these or even to guarantee that some entirely different course might not be chosen. We believe, however, that the third course (c) is less likely than the other two. . . ."

3. 3 April 1961: AD/NE Memorandum for the DCI: "Chen Yi's Statement Concerning Laos" (SECRET)

Paragraph 3: "At present, the Bloc probably estimates that they can achieve their objectives in Laos through indigenous forces, providing them logistic support and a limited amount of covert North Vietnamese participation as cadres, technicians, and a few combat leaders. We continue to estimate that the Bloc would respond to US military escalation in Laos which threatened the favorable military position held by the Pathet Lao forces. The form which a Bloc military response would take would depend on the nature and scale of SEATO's military operations in Laos. The North Vietnamese would probably bear the main brunt of any military support to the Pathet Lao, with the Chinese participating on a major scale only should this become necessary to preserve the present Communist stake in Laos."

4. 14 April 1961: AD/NE Memorandum For the DCI: "Short-term Intentions in Laos" (SECRET)

Paragraph 2: "It is possible that at present the USSR has no intention of seriously negotiating, confident that the

situation in Laos is so soft that a new military push by the PL might cause the PML either to fold up or frenetically to pull its forces southward, delivering Vientiane, Luang Prabang, and Pakxane over to PL control. The USSR may consider that it can string the US along for some time with an unhurried "readiness" to negotiate, in the belief that the situation in Laos will meanwhile so deteriorate that the US and SEATO will either not intervene at all, or will do so too late to salvage much."

Paragraph 3: "We believe it more likely, however, the Soviet leaders genuinely fear that if pushed too far or put off too long, the US will in fact intervene on a major scale. We further believe that the USSR will not abandon the fairly cautious course it has pursued in Laos thus far, fearing the risks that major US intervention in Laos might in turn lead to expanded hostilities. . . ."

Paragraph 4: "Thus we believe that the USSR will seek to delay negotiations for some time longer, possibly for some weeks, confident that the PLO position is progressively deteriorating and may collapse at any time. . . ."

Paragraph 5: "Although there have been some Sino-Soviet differences of tone and approach concerning Laos, we believe that Communist China and the USSR are in general accord on policy there thus far. The Communist course appears clearly to be set and

guided primarily by Moscow, with the DRV the chief executive agent, and China an additional source of logistic and moral support."

5. 17 April 1961: AD/NE Memorandum for the DCI: "Probable Communist Reactions to Certain Actions in Laos" (TOP SECRET)

Paragraph 1: "We continue to believe that the Communists have great confidence in their eventual success in Laos. Indeed, their confidence probably has reached new heights in recent weeks as the military capability and will to resist of the Royal Laotian Government has sagged."

Paragraph 2: "Viewed from this perspective, the proposed course of action almost certainly would not appear likely to the Communists to reverse the present favorable trend. . . ."

Paragraph 4: "On this basis, we would not anticipate an immediate and violent Communist military response to the proposed action. The Communists would demand withdrawal of foreign troops from Laos and would hinge further negotiation toward a cease-fire and conference upon such withdrawal. They would appeal to world opinion, particularly the UK, France, and the Asian neutrals. They would threaten retaliatory military action to "protect" the Laotians but they would probably delay overt intervention until they had assessed the reaction in Laos and the world at large.

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Paragraph 5: "At the same time, they would probably undertake the seizure of Luang Prabang with Pathet Lao forces stiffened by covert Viet Minh personnel. Once in possession of the royal capital, the Communists would invest a Souvanna Phouma-type government. This government would declare itself the legal government of Laos. If covert Viet Minh support were not adequate to enable the Pathet Lao to take Luang Prabang, it is possible that regular Viet Minh units might be openly committed. However, in the absence of direct US or other non-Laotian support in the defense of Luang Prabang, we think it unlikely that this necessity would arise.

Paragraph 7: If the proposed action did after a time appear to steady the Royal Laotian government, the Communists might then elect to introduce Viet Minh units openly into the northern provinces and the Plaine des Jarres. . . . "

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